

# Faith without deeds is dead

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] A week ago, the Coalition of the Willing, do you know this group? 31 countries who have! together pledged support for Ukraine, met together. And their meeting, journalist Owen! Matthews said, yielded much bold talk, agreeing in principle to provide reassurance forces in Ukraine to put boots on the ground. And yet after 10 years of what he describes as a fateful mismatch between the West's words and deeds, Matthew's conclusion was, Ukraine is on its own. Europe is all talk and no action. That's world politics and stuff going on. In our passage today, James 2, in front of us, James explores the connection between talk and action between what Christians say and believe and what we do. In a sense, forget about what's going on in the world at large. Is it possible that we could be people who are all talk and very little action?

Now, the passage begins in verse 14, you see, with a couple of questions. What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? And James is writing to my brothers and sisters, and in chapter 2, verse 1, back over the page, they are believers in our Lord Jesus Christ. And we know this, it is such a massive thing to become a believer, to stand up publicly, to be baptised, to say, I turn from my sins, I turn to Jesus Christ, I put my trust in him, I submit to him as my Lord.

And the Bible says, we've looked at this already this morning, when you put your faith in Jesus, you are put right with God, you're justified, you're saved, you belong to him forever. Not because of how you've lived or what you've done, but because of your faith in Jesus, your trust in the living God. In our passage this morning, James zooms in on faith to ask, what does this saving faith in Jesus look like? Maybe a question for us, is the faith that we have the real thing?

Do you and I have the kind of genuine living faith in Jesus that is so precious and will save us? Or is it possible there is a kind of so-called faith that is actually useless and will not save? And scarily, in a sense, there is that kind of faith. And that is what James wants us to know about. See, look again at verse 14. What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? And the answer will be, it's no good. Can such faith, a faith without deeds, save them? And the answer will be, no. Jesus and the apostles, you know this, they teach that we live out our days in the shadow of a final day of judgment. And on that coming judgment day, as we stand before God, some of us will be condemned to hell, whilst others will be saved wonderfully for all eternity. And James writes here to warn his readers and us that it is possible to have a so-called faith and to think that you're okay, and yet the faith that you say you have is in fact no good now and will not save you on the day of judgment. Because it's a bogus faith, an empty faith, a dead faith. It is dead because it is faith without deeds. Empty Christian talk with no Christian action. If you want a headline for what God's saying to us this morning through his word, here it is. Faith without deeds is dead. Do you see this in the passage? Verse 17, look, faith by itself, if it's not accompanied by action, is dead. And then in verse 26 at the end, faith without deeds is dead. It's repeated twice. This is the point. Dead faith is no good. It's useless. And it will not save you.

[ 4 : 5 4 ] Well then this morning, with these verses in front of us, just walk through the verses with me. As you notice that we together are warned about dead, empty faith, and then shown the kind of faith that's living and saving and genuine. So firstly, in verses 15 to 17, look down with me and know that warm words are no good. Look at this. What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Well, verse 15. Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. And if one of you says to them, go in peace, keep warm and well fed, but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? James is talking here about a Christian brother or sister, someone in our church family or further away, who is poor, who doesn't have the right clothes for winter, who is malnourished. How do you respond, we who claim to have faith? Go in peace here is a bit more than, I hope you'll be alright mate. It's kind of Christian religious words.

Bless you, that must be so tough. I pray that the Lord will warn you and fill you. Maybe you feel you haven't got the space with your super committed life to actually take time to help someone. Or maybe you say, well I've paid my taxes and the welfare state will provide for them. You speak warm Christian words, but do nothing. James asks, what good is it?

And the answer is none, it's no good. It's no good for your fellow believer who is hungry and cold. And if you remember Jesus in Matthew's Gospel, teaching that on the final day of judgment he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

And to the goat people who refuse to feed and clothe and care for his disciples, he says, depart from me into the eternal fire. It'll be no good for us either.

You see verse 17, faith by itself, if it's not accompanied by action, is dead, says James. It's useless, just blah blah faith. It's just talk, but no Christian action.

[ 7 : 35 ] We might need to hear this, some of us. Do you think? It is possible to belong to St. John's and to be here regularly and to be on the email list and to like it. And what's said and what's sung on a Sunday, you say yes.

And you join in with a confession and you throw yourself in to sing with joy now, our God is for us. And you're learning to pray and speak Christian words. And you even have what you feel is a warm personal faith in Jesus that helps you.

And yet, outside of this hour on a Sunday, there is little or no Christian action in your life. And the truth is, when you see a Christian in need, you do next to nothing or nothing.

And James is no good that. Faith without deeds is dead. Warm words are no good. Secondly, in these verses, see this?

Right beliefs won't save. So in verse 18, James imagines someone raising an objection. Hey, you have faith and I have deeds.

[ 8 : 52 ] Is it not okay for some people to be big on faith and then others to be practical action people, you know, doers? So you can separate out the faith people and the deeds people.

That's alright, is it? And James said, no, it's not. Show me your faith without deeds, if you can. And I will show you my faith by my deeds.

It's going to be super important as this passage goes forward. You can't separate out faith and deeds. Instead, says James, I will demonstrate to you. I will show you my genuine living faith by my deeds of love.

Faith by itself, without deeds, is, well, verse 19. Let's say you believe that there is one God.

Let's say you believe that. That is orthodox faith. That's right belief. To stand up in church and say that there is one God in three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

[ 10 : 03 ] That is distinctive, true Christian faith. That is pretty good, right? To say that. And James says, yeah. And yet, verse 19, Even the demons believe that.

And they shudder. I read that and go, wow. That is, demons have orthodox faith and right belief. In the gospels, demons address Jesus as, son of the most high. How should we put this? It is not enough to have right beliefs.

And beliefs that don't touch your heart and life. Because being like the demons will not save you. James has been really strong here.

As he slices into bogus faith and empty faith. I wonder if, like me, you might need to hear this.

[ 11 : 11 ] When I became a Christian, I started going to a church where the Bible was taught at length and very clearly. And over a number of years, from the age of about 18 to 24, things happened quickly.

I turned my back on wrong beliefs. And I had my mind trained to read and know what was true. And stand up for what was true. And then I went and spent four years at a Bible college.

Just studying and being taught. And I came out with pretty right beliefs. I really did. It was that good. It really was.

But by itself, all that meant was that I'd caught up a little bit with what the demons believe. I mustn't think that right beliefs save.

I mustn't think I've understood the Bible right and so I'm fine with God. Warm Christian words are no good. Right beliefs won't say, because faith without deeds is dead, James has said.

[ 12 : 20 ] Whereas. We'll come now to this final section in verses 20 to 26. We're having warned us of the dangers of Christian talk without action.

In verse 20 onwards, James points us to two people who demonstrate real faith. Genuine faith. Beautiful, living faith.

You see, if faith without deeds is dead and will not save, would you see now from these verses how living, saving faith produces deeds.

Because you see, Abraham and Rahab will look at Abraham particularly in a minute. They act. Their religion, it's not just warm words and right belief.

They actually live out their trust in God. They do what God says. And it's beautiful and radical. And it is the kind of God-given faith that actually saves us.

[13:24] Read this through me, look. Verse 20. You foolish person, says James. Do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless, that it doesn't work?

Well, let me tell you about this man. Check out Abraham. The great father of the Jewish nation in Genesis 12 onwards. The great father of all Christians everywhere who share his faith.

Just read these verses closely with me. Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar?

You see that his faith and his actions were working together. And his faith was made complete by what he did. And the scripture was fulfilled that says Abraham believed God.

And it was credited to him as righteousness. And he was called God's friend. If I can paint the picture. The story of Abraham begins when he's called by God in Genesis 12.

[14:32] God promises to bless all the peoples of the earth through him. In Genesis 15, if you know the story. God takes Abraham outside his tent. And he says to him, look up at the sky and count the stars.

And I promise you, you will have this many descendants. And at that point, in Genesis 15 verse 6. The Bible says Abraham believed God.

And it was credited to him as righteousness. He put his faith in God. Had a genuine living trust in God. And because of his faith, he was counted righteous.

He was justified. He was put right with God forever. And he said, look up at that. 30 years later, in Genesis 22, the Lord tested Abraham's faith to the limit.

He asked him to sacrifice his only son. Would Abraham be a man who does what God says? Would he live out his genuine faith and show his faith by his deeds and prove himself to be right with God?

[15:41] And he did. Stunningly. If you know the story, Abraham, full of faith, he took his son up the mountain and he built an altar and he arranged the wood and he laid his son on top.

Abraham wasn't just a man who said, I trust in you. And it was all talk. He acted in trusting obedience. He did what God said and raised the knife to slay his son until the Lord's angel stepped in and said, stop.

Now I know that you fear God. Abraham had passed the test. Look at the life of Abraham, a man who's not just talk, but a genuine living trust who obeys God.

Wasn't useless faith, Abraham's. Wasn't in his head faith. Wasn't blah, blah faith. His was living, saving, active trust in God.

And verse 21 says he was considered righteous for what he did. See verse 22. His faith and his actions were working together.

[16:54] And his faith from 30 years beforehand was made complete. It reached maturity by what he did. And so, says verse 23, the scripture was fulfilled from 30 years beforehand that said Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness.

30 years beforehand, his living faith put him right with God. And 30 years later, he showed his living faith by his deeds and was proved right with God.

30 years later, James said, look at Abraham. Living, saving faith changes you. Produces deeds, action.

And when a person lives like Abraham, not just with Christian talk, but with Christian action, what are they called? End of verse 23.

He was called God's friend. I love that. Just in the middle here. Isn't that actually what you and I want, more than anything else in the world, if we think about it?

[18:10] To be called God's friend for all eternity. Here's James' point, verse 24. You see, a person is considered righteous by what they do.

And not by faith alone. Faith alone here is bogus faith. It's empty faith. It's just words faith. Mum and Dad told me this stuff and I say I believe it, but nothing going on in my life.

You'll never be saved. You'll never be put right with God or proved right with God with faith alone. No, living, saving faith shows itself in deeds with acts of loving obedience. About 600 years ago, a man called Thomas A. Kempis wrote, Truly at the day of judgment, we shall not be asked what we've read, but how we've acted. Not how well we've spoken, but whether we have lived righteously. On the day we stand before our God, warm words, right beliefs, they won't count. [ 19 : 17 ] The Bible says here, only humble, living faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. A faith that shows itself in how we live.

The same thing for Rahab. We haven't got time to look at her. The prostitute who was considered righteous for what she did. She didn't just say things about God. She gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction. She took risks to obey God. You can read about that in Joshua chapter 2. Here's the point one more time at the end of our passage.

Verse 26. As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead. Genuine living faith. The faith that will see us saved for all eternity is faith with deeds. So we sit here this morning and we say, so what?

[ 20 : 18 ] What are you and I meant to do in response to this passage? There aren't actually any commands in these verses.

I've read these verses again and again this week. Sometimes I write a sermon and it just trots out and I know what I'm going to say and it all kind of makes sense. I've read these verses this week and they have slightly cut me open.

As I look at my own life and how tempted I am to be a blah blah man who hides away in my house and does very little. And if you recognise in your own life the danger of being lots of talk and little Christian action.

And if like me you value and you want to be called God's friend. Then together, broken by God's word maybe, we are meant to humble ourselves before the God who shows us favour.

James is a whole letter. And the big commands come in chapter 4 verses 6 to 10. And in chapter 4 verse 6, James tells his brothers and sisters that God gives us more grace.

[ 21 : 31 ] That is why scripture says, God opposes the proud but shows favour to the humble. And then in verse 10 he says, humble yourself before the Lord and he will lift you up.

So don't read James 2 this morning and then try to do good deeds in your own strength. Hoping that you might save yourself. Must try harder and maybe God will call me his friend.

Humble yourself before the Lord and seek from him more grace. That he might grow in us the genuine living faith that will save us.

And in a moment after we've sung, we're going to share in the Lord's Supper together. A simple meal of bread and wine. And we say to him, we will pray and say, we come to you Lord as sinners. Not trusting in our righteousness. But in your great mercy. We'll remember the mercy of God towards us through Jesus. His once for all sacrifice for us on the cross.

[ 22 : 43 ] As he died in our place. Bearing our sins. So that unrighteous people like us may be washed clean and put right with God. If you eat and drink this morning as a believer in Jesus.

Put your faith in him. And know the joy of being right with God. And then, strengthened by his mercy and grace to us.

And having been lifted up. You and I are meant to go out into our days and into our weeks. With genuine living faith. As God's friends.

And we are to show our faith by our deeds. Not just talk. But active obedience. From James so far. Curb your anger this week.

Keep a tight rein on your tongue. Stop criticising people. Look after the needy in their distress. Keep yourself from being polluted by the world. Don't show favouritism.

[ 23 : 45 ] Here in church. Or in your life. Give yourself to radical. Growing to be like Christ. Action. And here's the thing.

You know. We can do that. And we will do that. Not because we're strong and wonderful. But because we have a God who gives us more grace.

We have a God who is more than able. By the Holy Spirit. To grow in us. The kind of faith. With action. That will on the final day.

Not only please our Lord and Saviour. But prove that we are right with him. Do you not want that more than anything in the world? He looks upon you on that day and he says.

You are my friend. Well then together today. Let's humble ourselves before the Lord. Receive his grace. And by his spirit.

[ 24 : 43 ] Go out into the world and live for him. With active Christ-like obedience. Let me lead us in a prayer.

We're going to pray. And then see. Faith. Faith.

Without deeds. Is dead. Almighty God and Father. Thank you this morning. For the. The cutting clarity.

Of your word to us. We belong to you. How awful it would be. For us just to be blah blah speaking people.

Who do little. Who say we love you. Yet don't act in obedience. We are so thankful that you are the God.

[ 25 : 42 ] Who gives more grace. To those whom you love. We are so grateful for the sacrifice of Christ. Through which our sins are washed away.

So grateful for the gift of your spirit. And your promise to change us into the likeness of your son.

Help us now we pray. To humbly fix our eyes on Christ our saviour.

To receive grace. As we share bread and wine. And then to go out into our lives with conviction.

And to live for you. And we pray that for God.

In Jesus name. Amen.